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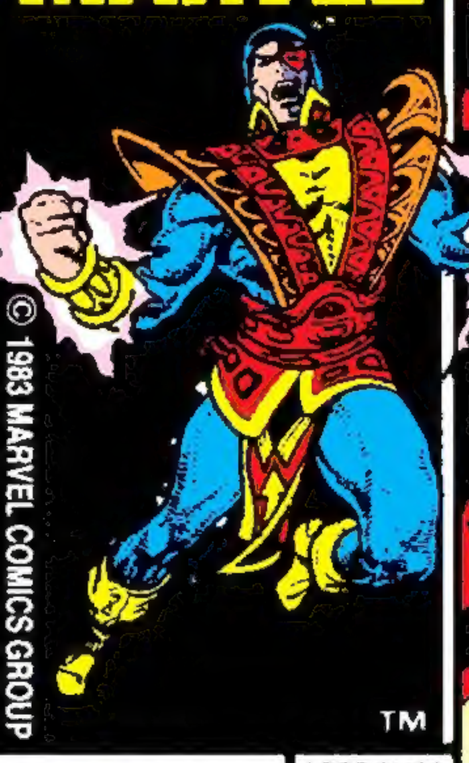

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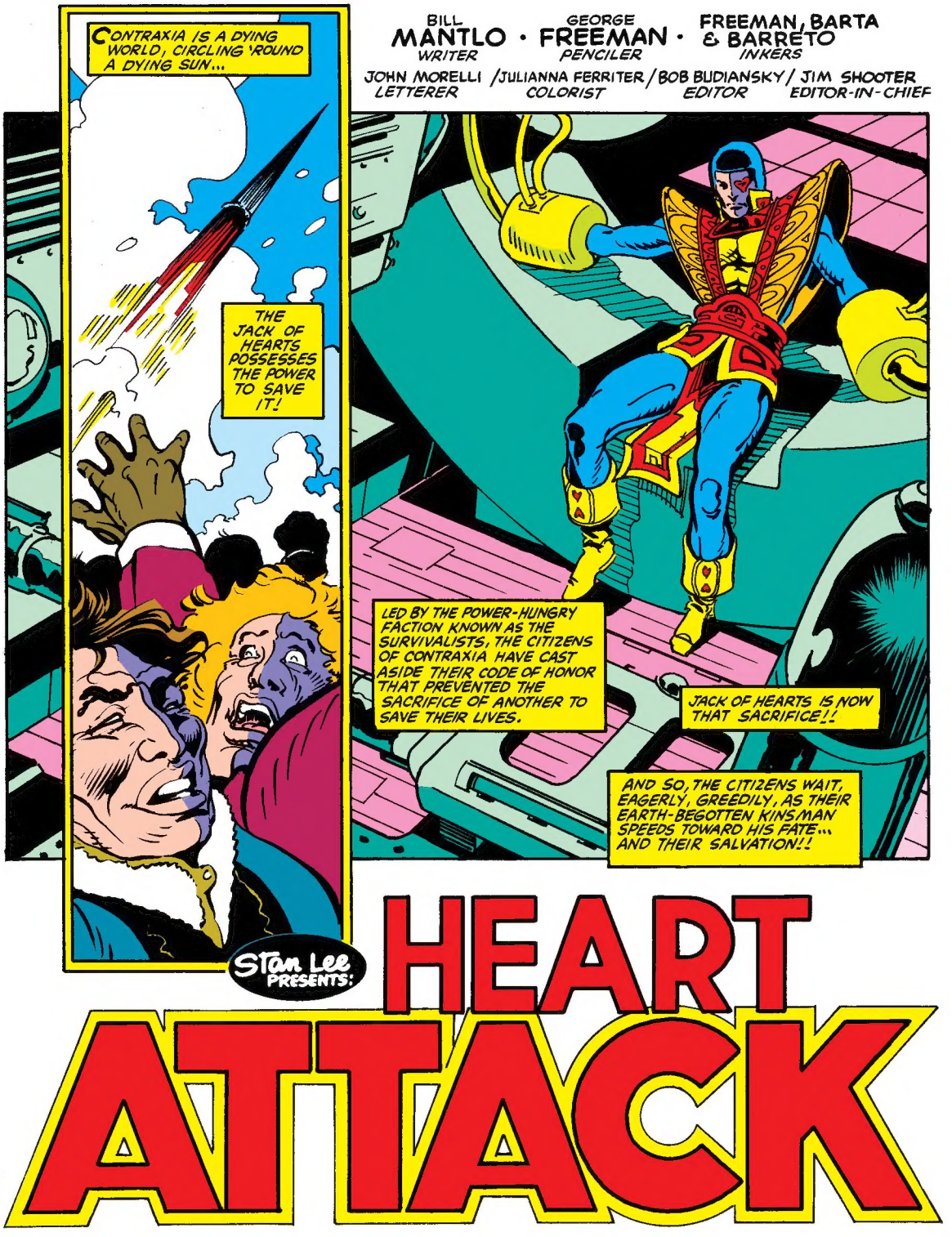
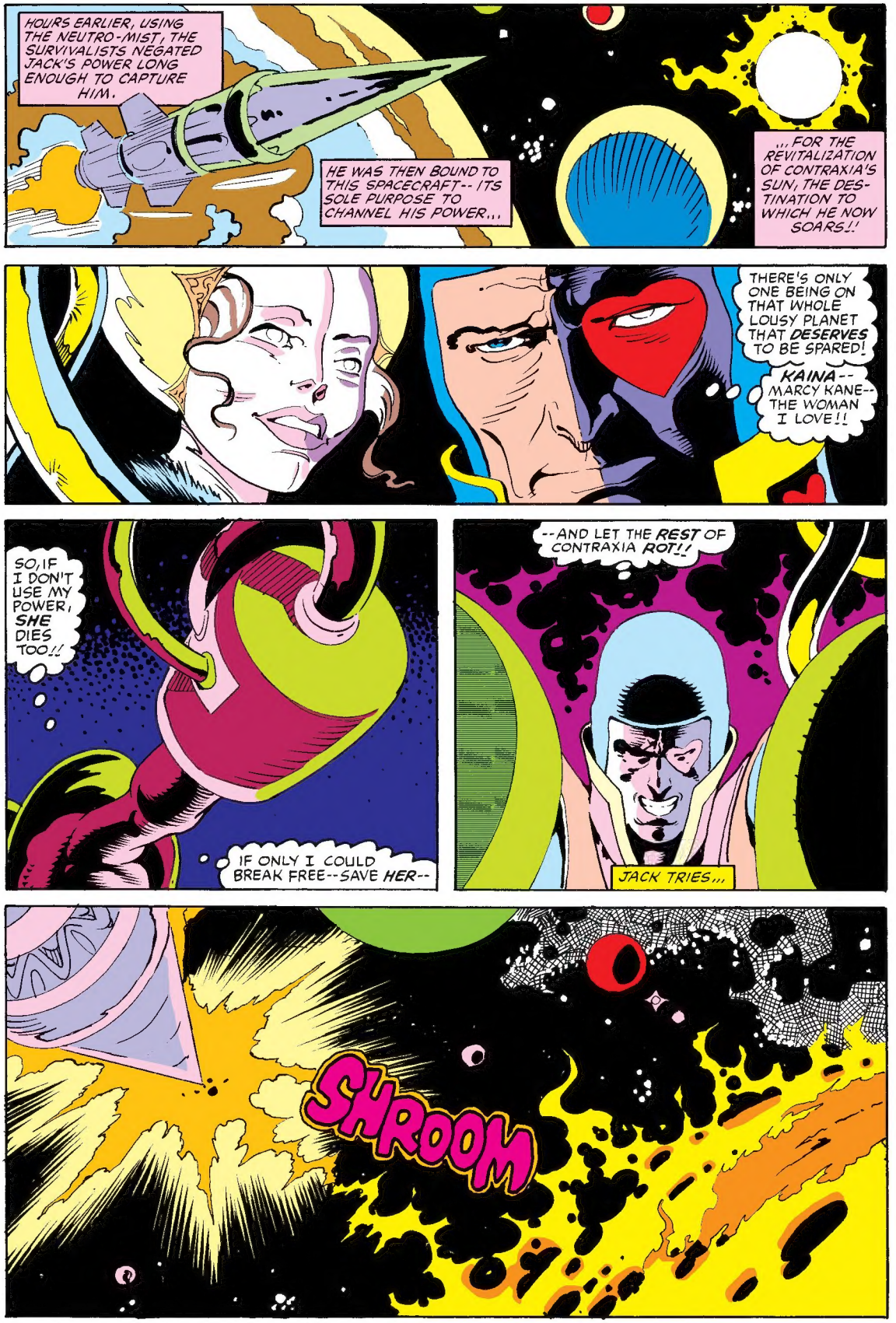
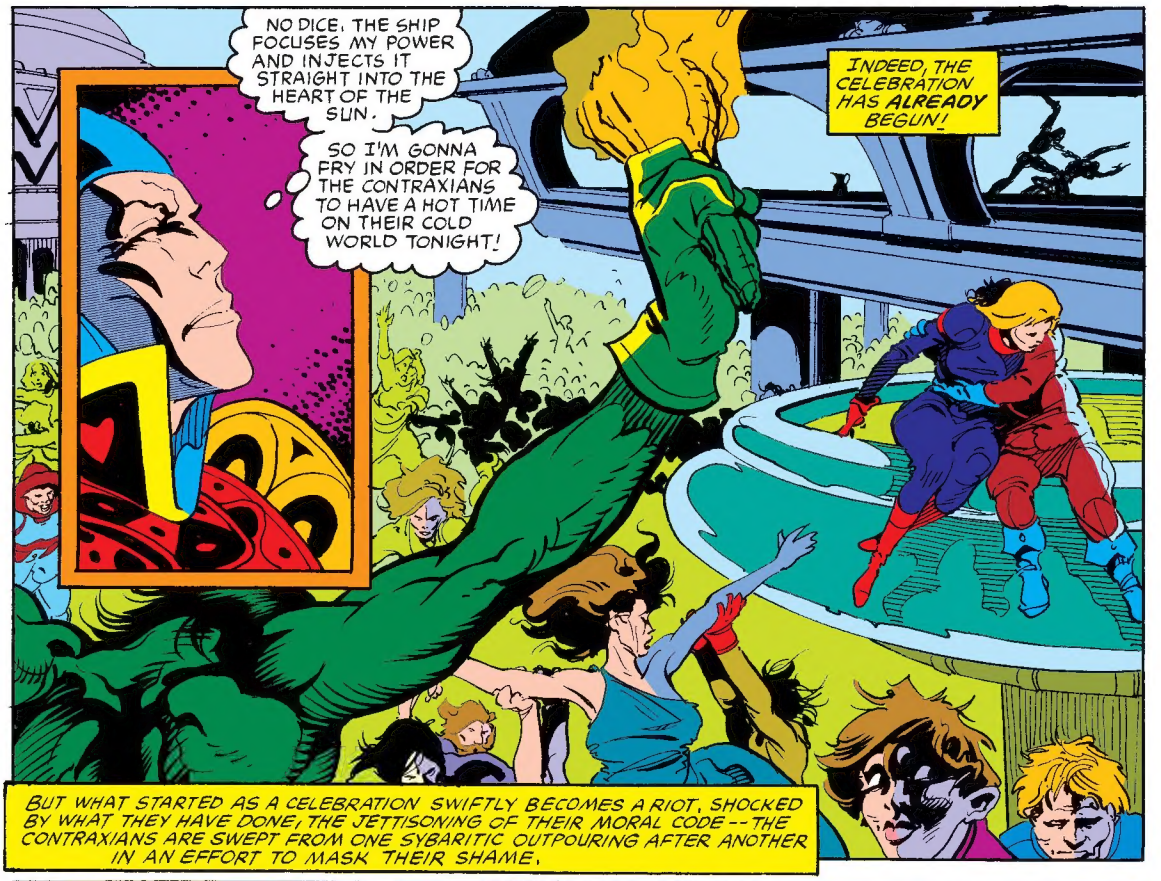
#4 IN A FOUR-ISSUE LIMITED SERIES

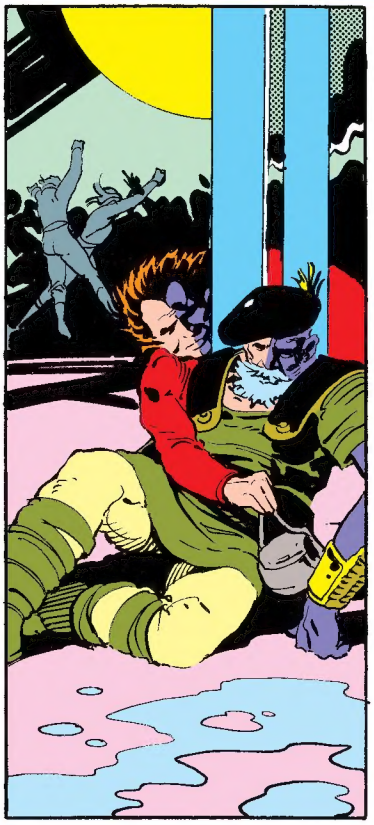
THE JACK OF HEARTS™

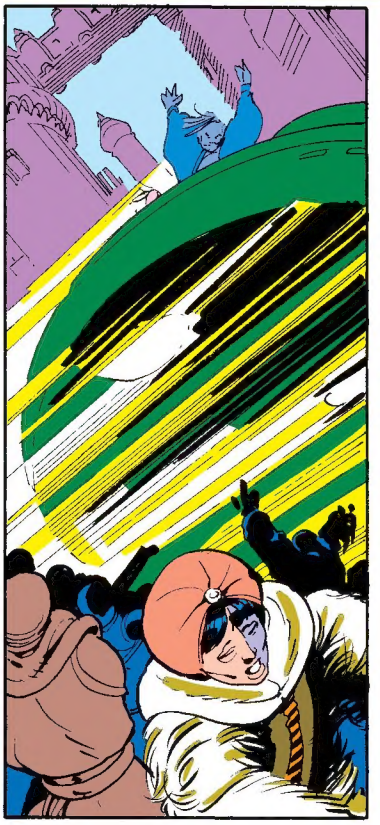
HEART OF THE SUN!


BILL MANTLO WRITER
GEORGE FREEMAN PENCILER
FREEMAN, BARTA & BARRETO INKERS
JOHN MORELLI LETTERER
JULIANNA FERRITER COLORIST
BOB BUDIANSKY EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
CONTRAXIA IS A DYING WORLD, CIRCLING 'ROUND A DYING SUN...
THE JACK OF HEARTS POSSESSES THE POWER TO SAVE IT!
LED BY THE POWER-HUNGRY FACTION KNOWN AS THE SURVIVALISTS, THE CITIZENS OF CONTRAXIA HAVE CAST ASIDE THEIR CODE OF HONOR THAT PREVENTED THE SACRIFICE OF ANOTHER TO SAVE THEIR LIVES.
JACK OF HEARTS IS NOW THAT SACRIFICE!!
AND SO, THE CITIZENS WAIT, EAGERLY, GREEDILY, AS THEIR EARTH-BEGOTTEN KINSMAN SPEEDS TOWARD HIS FATE... AND THEIR SALVATION!!
Stan Lee PRESENTS:
HEART ATTACK


HOURS EARLIER, USING THE NEUTRO-MIST, THE SURVIVALISTS NEGATED JACK'S POWER LONG ENOUGH TO CAPTURE HIM.
HE WAS THEN BOUND TO THIS SPACECRAFT-- ITS SOLE PURPOSE TO CHANNEL HIS POWER...
...FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF CONTRAXIA'S SUN, THE DESTINATION TO WHICH HE NOW SOARS!
THERE'S ONLY ONE BEING ON THAT WHOLE LOUSY PLANET THAT DESERVES TO BE SPARED!
KAINA-- MARCY KANE-- THE WOMAN I LOVE!!
SO, IF I DON'T USE MY POWER, SHE DIES TOO!!
IF ONLY I COULD BREAK FREE--SAVE HER--
--AND LET THE REST OF CONTRAXIA ROT!!
JACK TRIES...
SHROOM

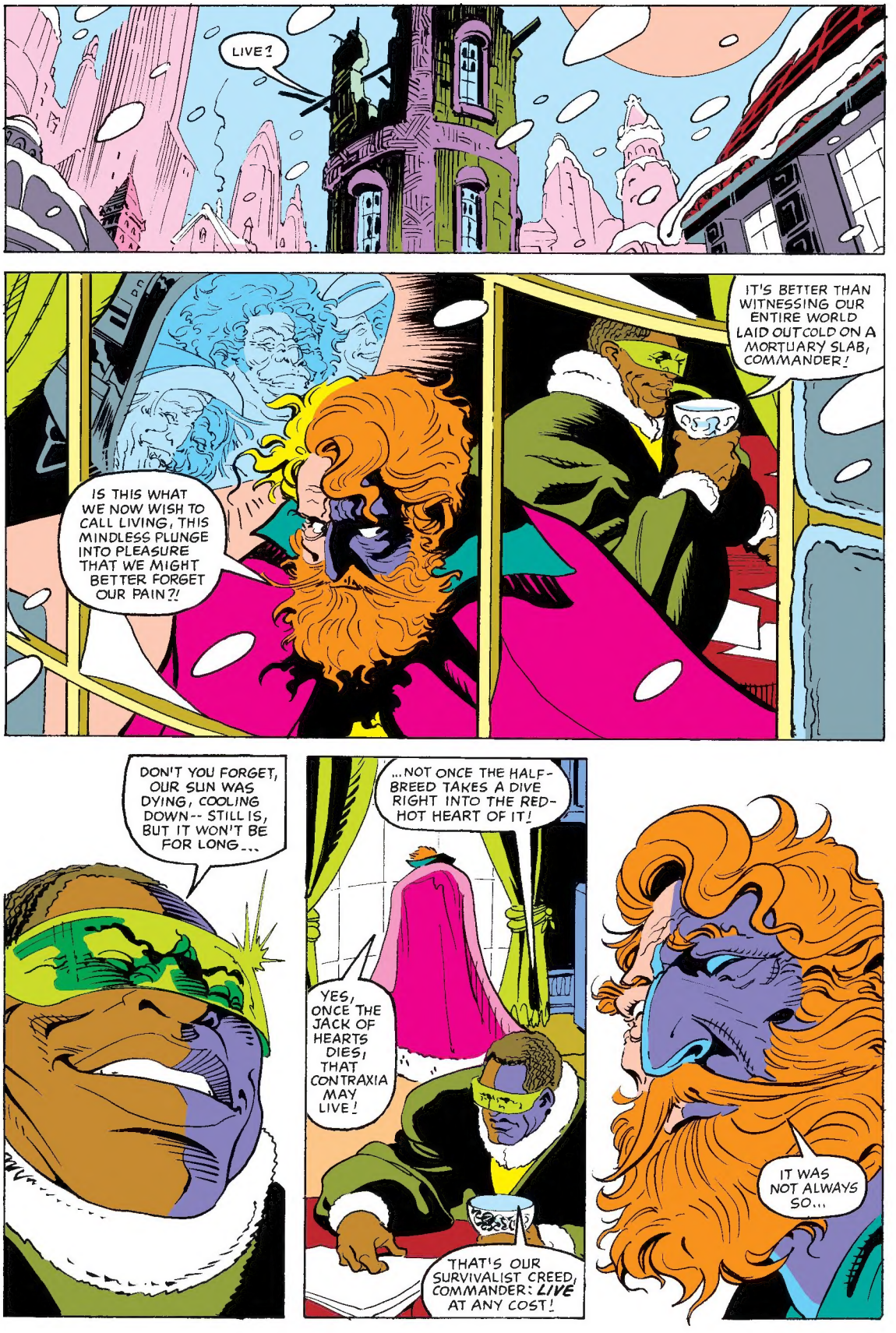

NO DICE. THE SHIP FOCUSES MY POWER AND INJECTS IT STRAIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE SUN.
SO I'M GONNA FRY IN ORDER FOR THE CONTRAXIANS TO HAVE A HOT TIME ON THEIR COLD WORLD TONIGHT!
INDEED, THE CELEBRATION HAS ALREADY BEGUN!
BUT WHAT STARTED AS A CELEBRATION SWIFTLY BECOMES A RIOT, SHOCKED BY WHAT THEY HAVE DONE, THE JETTISONING OF THEIR MORAL CODE -- THE CONTRAXIANS ARE SWEPT FROM ONE SYBARITIC OUTPOURING AFTER ANOTHER IN AN EFFORT TO MASK THEIR SHAME.

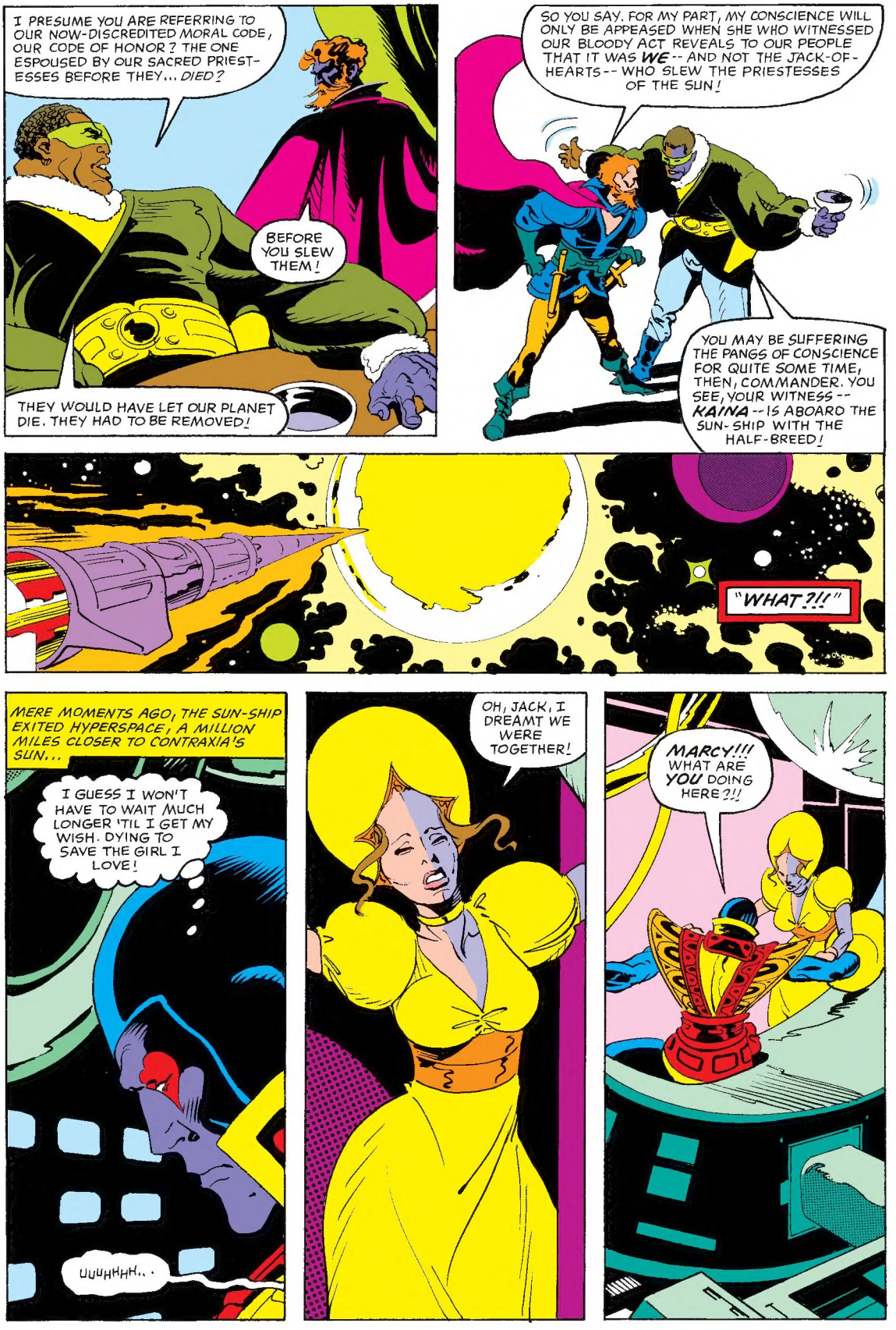


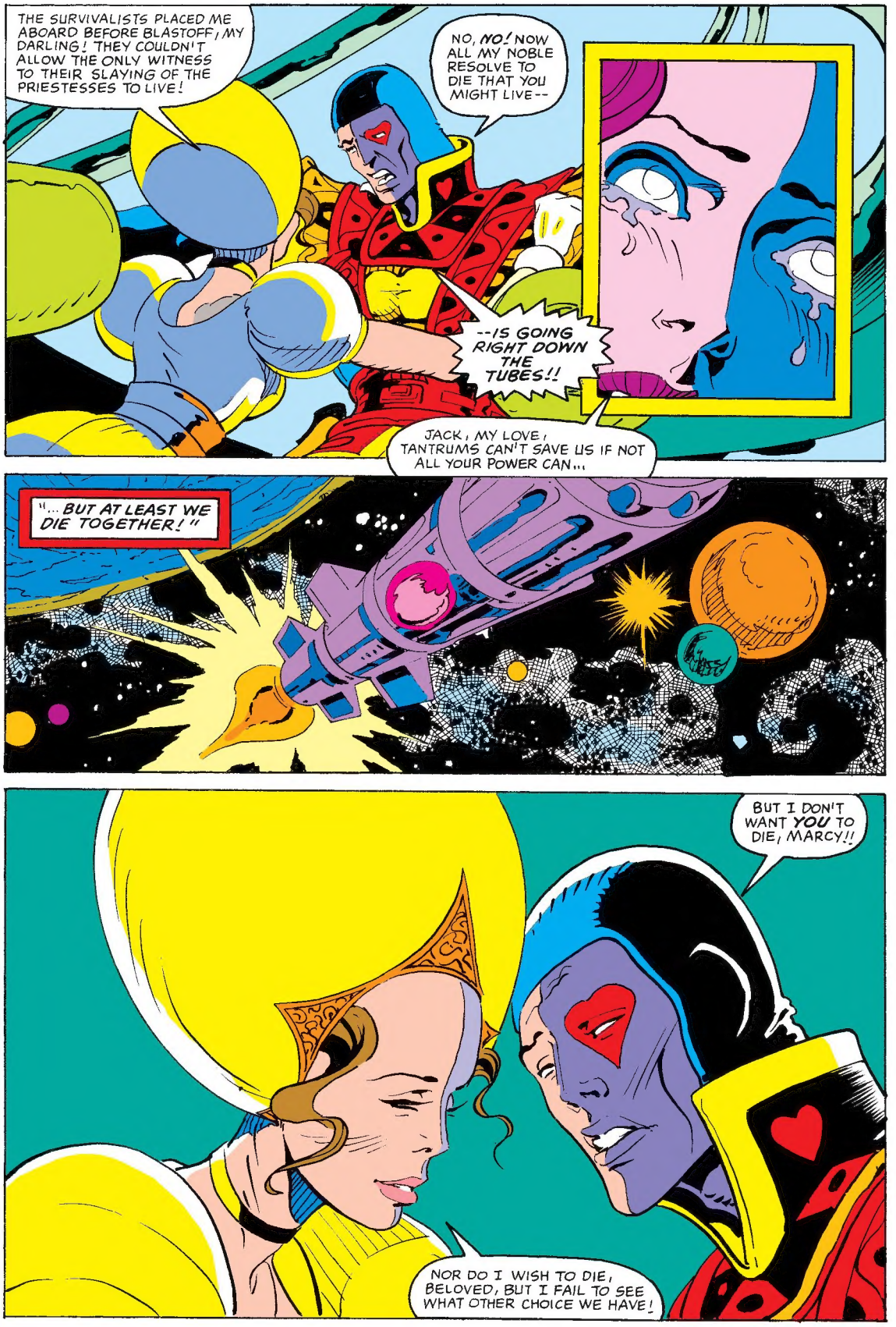


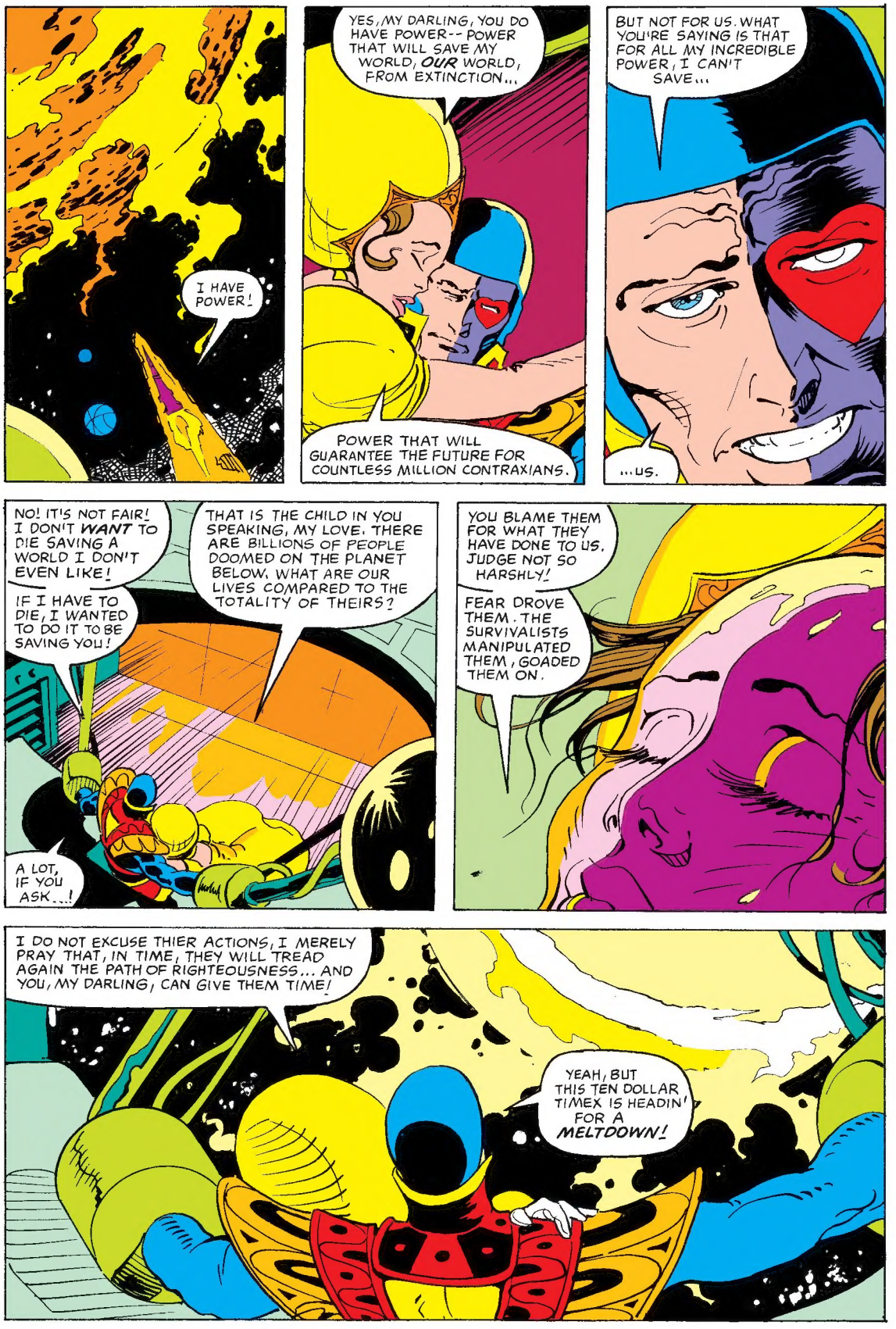
THERE ARE SOME WHO REGRET THEIR OWN AND THEIR NEIGHBORS' IMMORAL ACT...

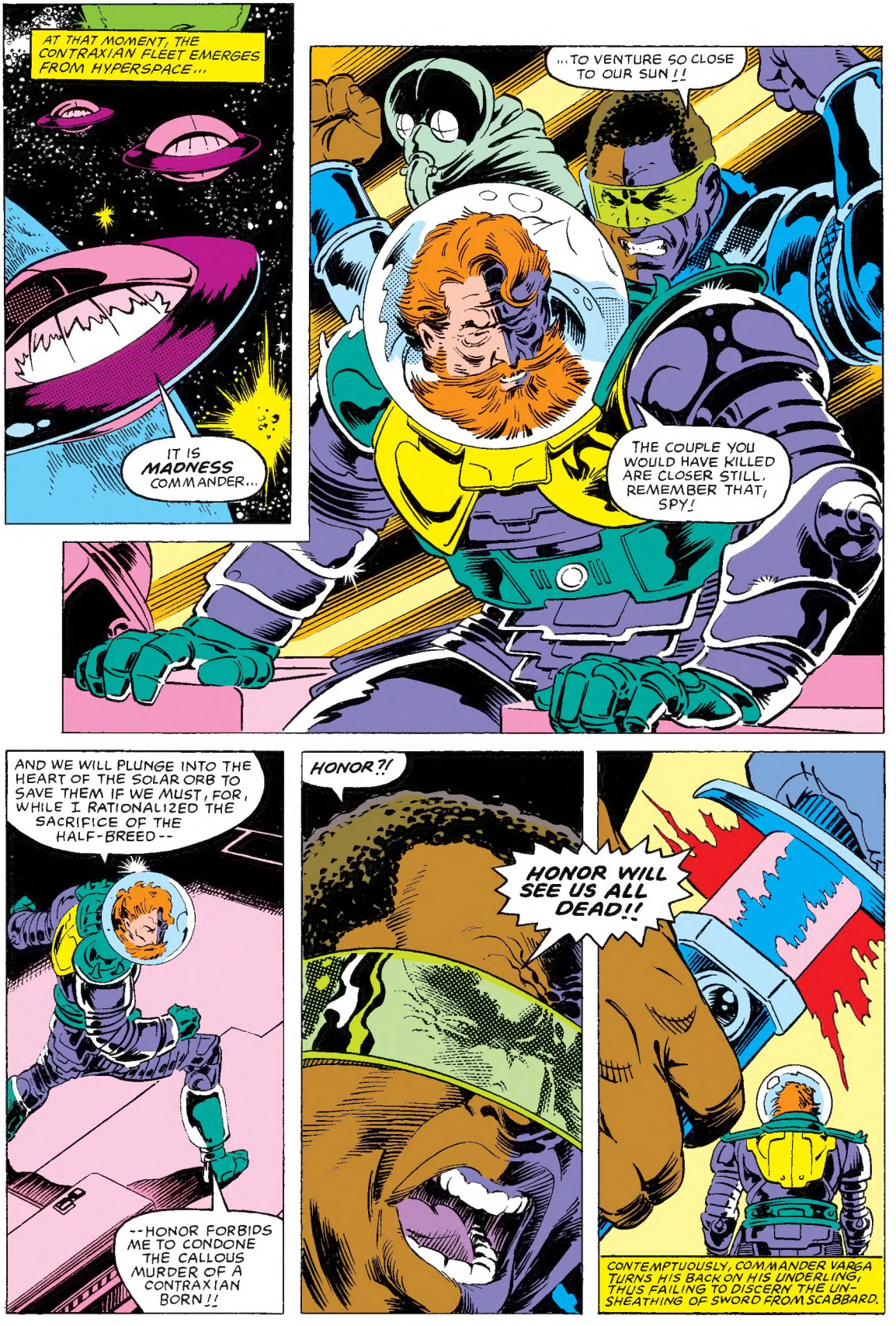
BUT FOR EVERY SOUL ANGUISHED OVER THE SACRIFICINS OF THE JACK OF HEARTS...
...THERE ARE COUNTLESS OTHERS SUSTAINED BY THE THOUGHT THAT AT LEAST THEY WILL LIVE!
BUT WHAT WE'VE DONE IS...WRONG!
AND WE'LL BE BERATING OURSELVES A THOUSAND, NAY, A MILLION YEARS HENCE, BOY! WHAT OF IT?!
OUR RACE WILL LIVE!!
LIVE?
LIVE??
LIVE!!


LIVE?
IT'S BETTER THAN WITNESSING OUR ENTIRE WORLD LAID OUT COLD ON A MORTUARY SLAB, COMMANDER!
IS THIS WHAT WE NOW WISH TO CALL LIVING, THIS MINDLESS PLUNGE INTO PLEASURE THAT WE MIGHT BETTER FORGET OUR PAIN?!
DON'T YOU FORGET, OUR SUN WAS DYING, COOLING DOWN-- STILL IS, BUT IT WON'T BE FOR LONG...
...NOT ONCE THE HALF-BREED TAKES A DIVE RIGHT INTO THE RED-HOT HEART OF IT!
YES, ONCE THE JACK OF HEARTS DIES, THAT CONTRAXIA MAY LIVE!
THAT'S OUR SURVIVALIST CREED, COMMANDER: LIVE AT ANY COST!
IT WAS NOT ALWAYS SO...

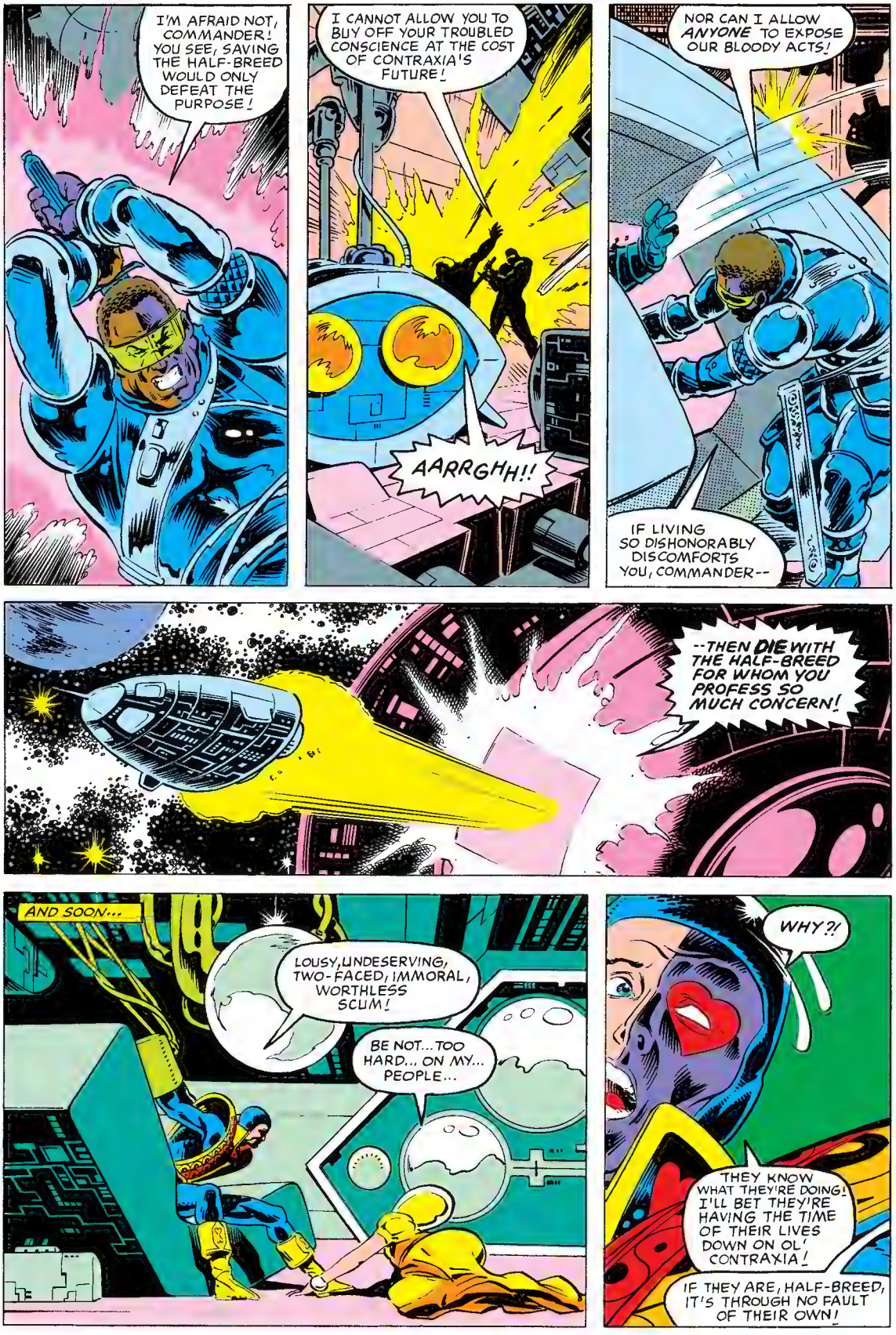

I PRESUME YOU ARE REFERRING TO OUR NOW-DISCREDITED MORAL CODE, OUR CODE OF HONOR? THE ONE ESPOUSED BY OUR SACRED PRIEST-ESSES BEFORE THEY... *DIED?*
BEFORE YOU SLEW THEM!
THEY WOULD HAVE LET OUR PLANET DIE. THEY HAD TO BE REMOVED!
SO YOU SAY. FOR MY PART, MY CONSCIENCE WILL ONLY BE APPEASED WHEN SHE WHO WITNESSED OUR BLOODY ACT REVEALS TO OUR PEOPLE THAT IT WAS **WE** -- AND NOT THE JACK-OF-HEARTS -- WHO SLEW THE PRIESTESSES OF THE SUN!
YOU MAY BE SUFFERING THE PANGS OF CONSCIENCE FOR QUITE SOME TIME, THEN, COMMANDER. YOU SEE, YOUR WITNESS -- **KAINA** -- IS ABOARD THE SUN-SHIP WITH THE HALF-BREED!
"WHAT?!!"
MERE MOMENTS AGO, THE SUN-SHIP EXITED HYPERSPACE, A MILLION MILES CLOSER TO CONTRAXIA'S SUN...
I GUESS I WON'T HAVE TO WAIT MUCH LONGER 'TIL I GET MY WISH. DYING TO SAVE THE GIRL I LOVE!
UUUHHHH...
OH, JACK, I DREAMT WE WERE TOGETHER!
MARCY!!! WHAT ARE **YOU** DOING HERE?!!


THE SURVIVALISTS PLACED ME ABOARD BEFORE BLASTOFF, MY DARLING! THEY COULDN'T ALLOW THE ONLY WITNESS TO THEIR SLAYING OF THE PRIESTESSES TO LIVE!
NO, NO! NOW ALL MY NOBLE RESOLVE TO DIE THAT YOU MIGHT LIVE--
--IS GOING RIGHT DOWN THE TUBES!!
JACK, MY LOVE, TANTRUMS CAN'T SAVE US IF NOT ALL YOUR POWER CAN...
"...BUT AT LEAST WE DIE TOGETHER!"
BUT I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE, MARCY!!
NOR DO I WISH TO DIE, BELOVED, BUT I FAIL TO SEE WHAT OTHER CHOICE WE HAVE!

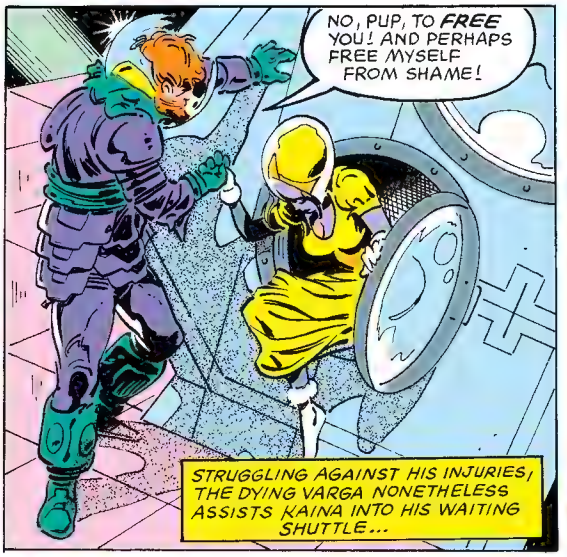

I HAVE POWER!
YES, MY DARLING, YOU DO HAVE POWER-- POWER THAT WILL SAVE MY WORLD, OUR WORLD, FROM EXTINCTION...
POWER THAT WILL GUARANTEE THE FUTURE FOR COUNTLESS MILLION CONTRAXIANS.
BUT NOT FOR US. WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT FOR ALL MY INCREDIBLE POWER, I CAN'T SAVE...
...US.
NO! IT'S NOT FAIR! I DON'T WANT TO DIE SAVING A WORLD I DON'T EVEN LIKE!
IF I HAVE TO DIE, I WANTED TO DO IT TO BE SAVING YOU!
THAT IS THE CHILD IN YOU SPEAKING, MY LOVE. THERE ARE BILLIONS OF PEOPLE DOOMED ON THE PLANET BELOW. WHAT ARE OUR LIVES COMPARED TO THE TOTALITY OF THEIRS?
A LOT, IF YOU ASK...!
YOU BLAME THEM FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE TO US. JUDGE NOT SO HARSHLY!
FEAR DROVE THEM. THE SURVIVALISTS MANIPULATED THEM, GOADED THEM ON.
I DO NOT EXCUSE THIER ACTIONS, I MERELY PRAY THAT, IN TIME, THEY WILL TREAD AGAIN THE PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS... AND YOU, MY DARLING, CAN GIVE THEM TIME!
YEAH, BUT THIS TEN DOLLAR TIMEX IS HEADIN' FOR A MELTDOWN!


AT THAT MOMENT, THE CONTRAXIAN FLEET EMERGES FROM HYPERSPACE...
IT IS MADNESS COMMANDER...
...TO VENTURE SO CLOSE TO OUR SUN!!
THE COUPLE YOU WOULD HAVE KILLED ARE CLOSER STILL, REMEMBER THAT, SPY!
AND WE WILL PLUNGE INTO THE HEART OF THE SOLAR ORB TO SAVE THEM IF WE MUST, FOR, WHILE I RATIONALIZED THE SACRIFICE OF THE HALF-BREED--
--HONOR FORBIDS ME TO CONDONE THE CALLOUS MURDER OF A CONTRAXIAN BORN!!
HONOR?!
HONOR WILL SEE US ALL DEAD!!
CONTEMPTUOUSLY, COMMANDER VARGA TURNS HIS BACK ON HIS UNDERLING, THUS FAILING TO DISCERN THE UN-SHEATHING OF SWORD FROM SCABBARD.

MEANWHILE, ENTERING THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF CONTRAXIA'S SUN...
HOT... SO HOT!
I DON'T FEEL IT! I CAN'T! MY BODY'S PURE ENERGY! BUT YOU--!
IT WILL BE OVER SOON! SOON I'LL BE BEYOND FEELING! SOON...
MARCY!!
WEEP NOT FOR ME, BELOVED...
"WEEP NOT AT ALL, FOR I WOULD NOT HAVE YOU GO AS A CHILD, CRYING IN THE FACE OF DEATH--
"--BUT AS A MAN, GOING BRAVELY TO DESTRUCTION THAT COUNTLESS GENERATIONS MIGHT SURVIVE!"
I'M GOING TO SAVE THEM!
I'M GOING TO REACH THEIR SHIP, TURN IT AROUND, AND BRING THEM BACK--
--OR DIE IN THE ATTEMPT!

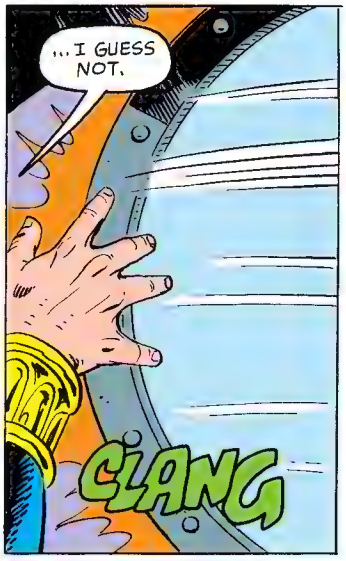

I'M AFRAID NOT, COMMANDER! YOU SEE, SAVING THE HALF-BREED WOULD ONLY DEFEAT THE PURPOSE!
I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO BUY OFF YOUR TROUBLED CONSCIENCE AT THE COST OF CONTRAXIA'S FUTURE!
AARRGHH!!
NOR CAN I ALLOW ANYONE TO EXPOSE OUR BLOODY ACTS!
IF LIVING SO DISHONORABLY DISCOMFORTS YOU, COMMANDER--
--THEN DIE WITH THE HALF-BREED FOR WHOM YOU PROFESS SO MUCH CONCERN!
AND SOON...
LOUSY, UNDESERVING, TWO-FACED, IMMORAL, WORTHLESS SCUM!
BE NOT...TOO HARD... ON MY... PEOPLE...
WHY?!
THEY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING! I'LL BET THEY'RE HAVING THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES DOWN ON OL' CONTRAXIA!
IF THEY ARE, HALF-BREED, IT'S THROUGH NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN!

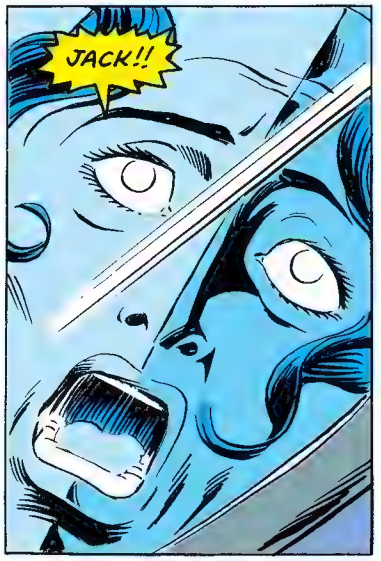
BUT BECAUSE I MISLED THEM!
I HAVE DOCKED WITH YOUR CRAFT TO MAKE AMENDS!
VARGA! WHAT'S THE DEAL, COMMANDER? DON'T TRUST THE SUN? COME TO FINISH US OFF PERSONALLY?

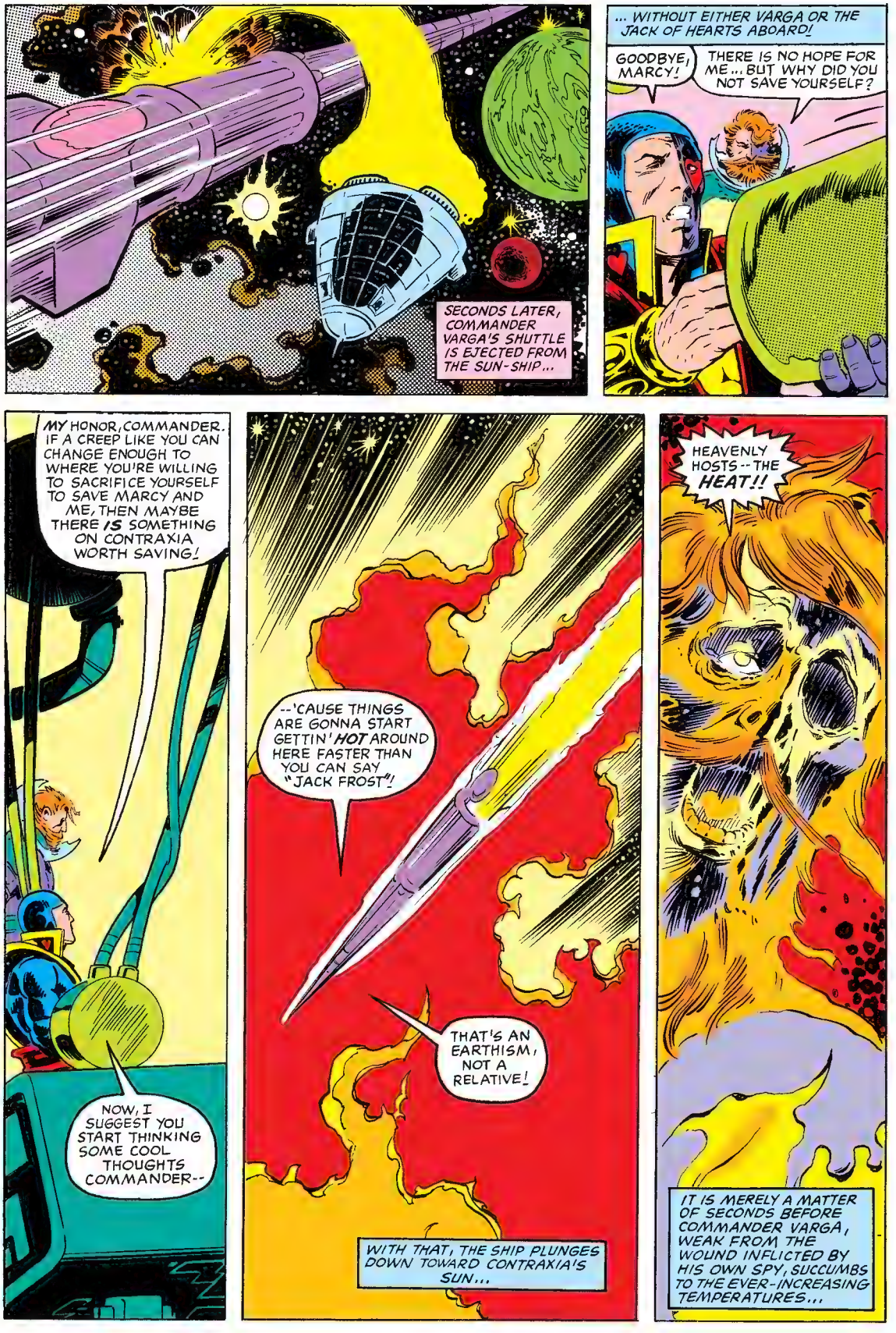

NO, PUP, TO FREE YOU! AND PERHAPS FREE MYSELF FROM SHAME!
STRUGGLING AGAINST HIS INJURIES, THE DYING VARGA NONETHELESS ASSISTS KAINA INTO HIS WAITING SHUTTLE...

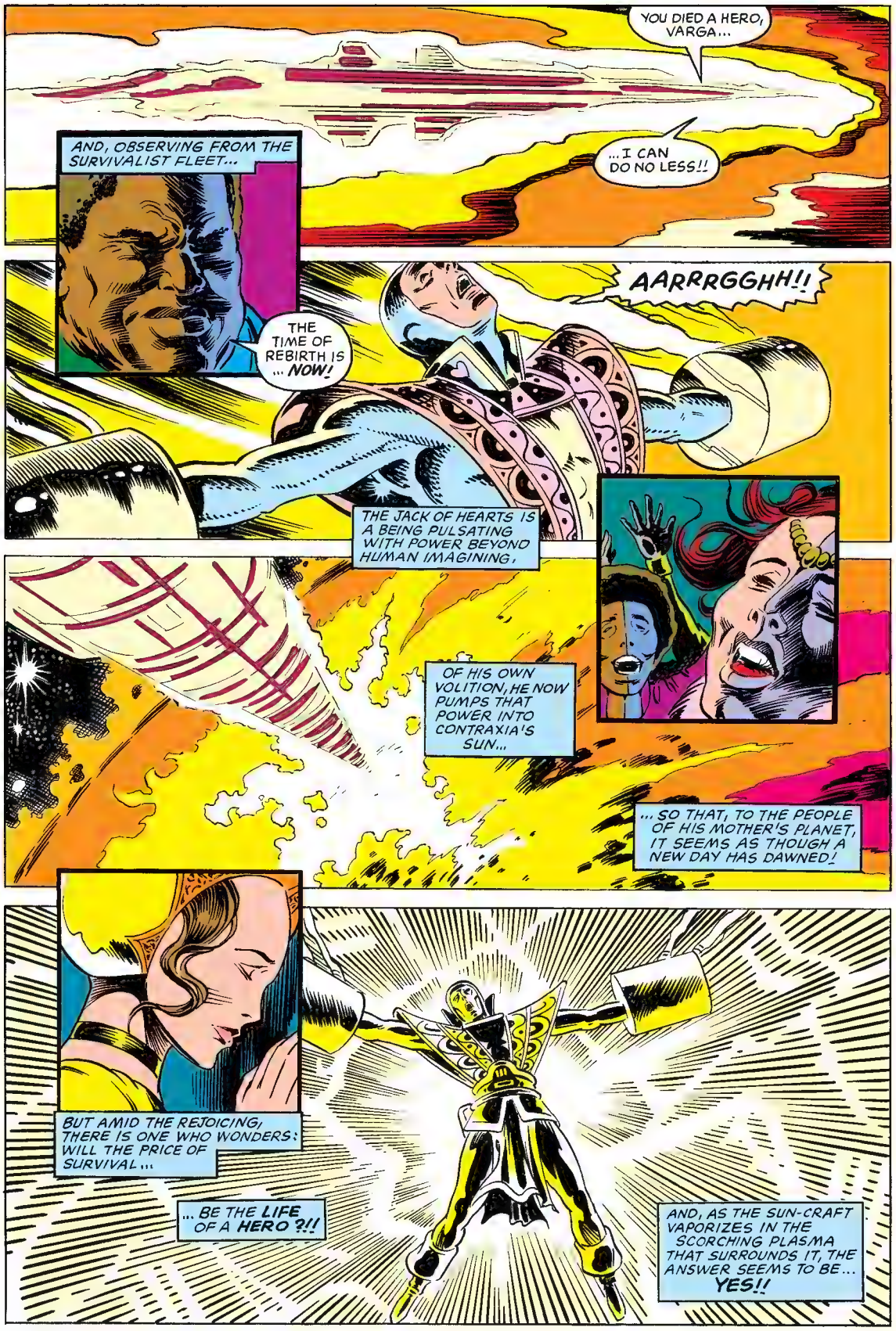
... AND THEN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO FREEING JACK!
WHY, VARGA?
I WAS WRONG. THERE IS NO HONOR IN SACRIFICING ONE MAN THAT ANOTHER MIGHT LIVE... AND MAN SHOULD NOT LIVE WITHOUT HONOR!

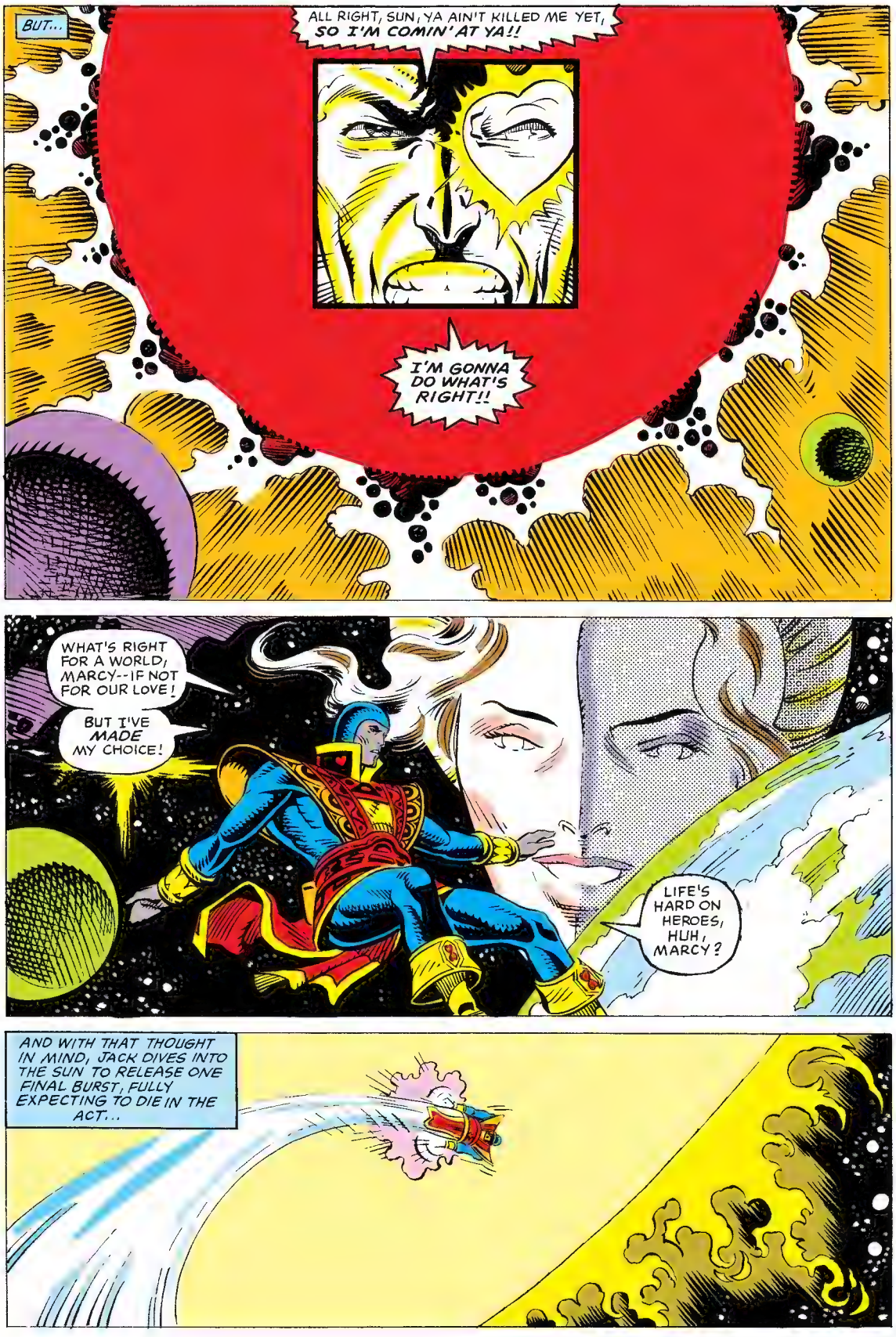
JOIN THE GIRL NOW, STRIPLING, THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME!
NO...


... I GUESS NOT.
CLANG


JACK!!

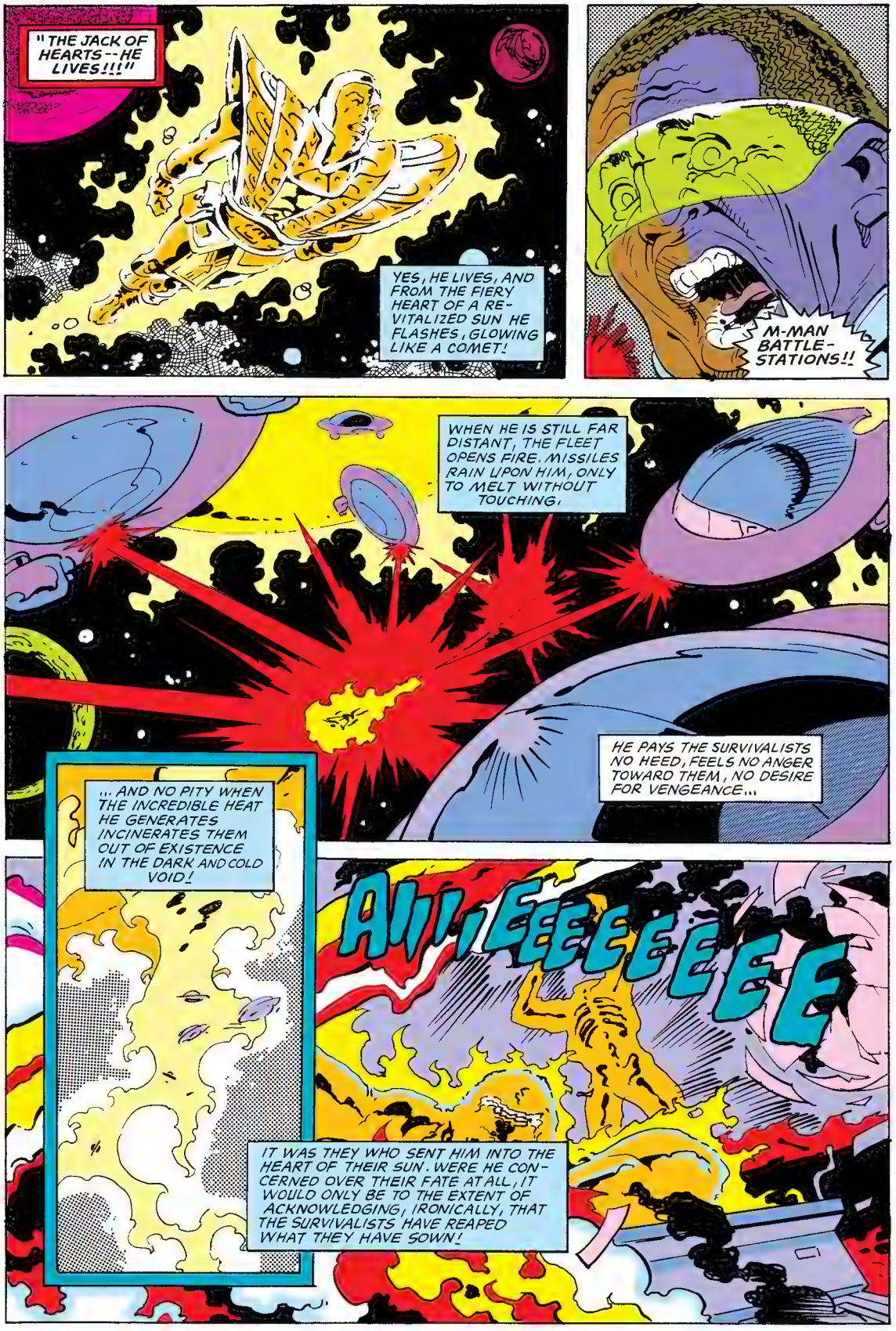

SECONDS LATER, COMMANDER VARGA'S SHUTTLE IS EJECTED FROM THE SUN-SHIP...
... WITHOUT EITHER VARGA OR THE JACK OF HEARTS ABOARD!
GOODBYE, MARCY!
THERE IS NO HOPE FOR ME... BUT WHY DID YOU NOT SAVE YOURSELF?
MY HONOR, COMMANDER. IF A CREEP LIKE YOU CAN CHANGE ENOUGH TO WHERE YOU'RE WILLING TO SACRIFICE YOURSELF TO SAVE MARCY AND ME, THEN MAYBE THERE IS SOMETHING ON CONTRAXIA WORTH SAVING!
NOW, I SUGGEST YOU START THINKING SOME COOL THOUGHTS COMMANDER--
--'CAUSE THINGS ARE GONNA START GETTIN' HOT AROUND HERE FASTER THAN YOU CAN SAY "JACK FROST"!
THAT'S AN EARTHISM, NOT A RELATIVE!
WITH THAT, THE SHIP PLUNGES DOWN TOWARD CONTRAXIA'S SUN...
HEAVENLY HOSTS -- THE HEAT!!
IT IS MERELY A MATTER OF SECONDS BEFORE COMMANDER VARGA, WEAK FROM THE WOUND INFLICTED BY HIS OWN SPY, SUCCUMBS TO THE EVER-INCREASING TEMPERATURES...

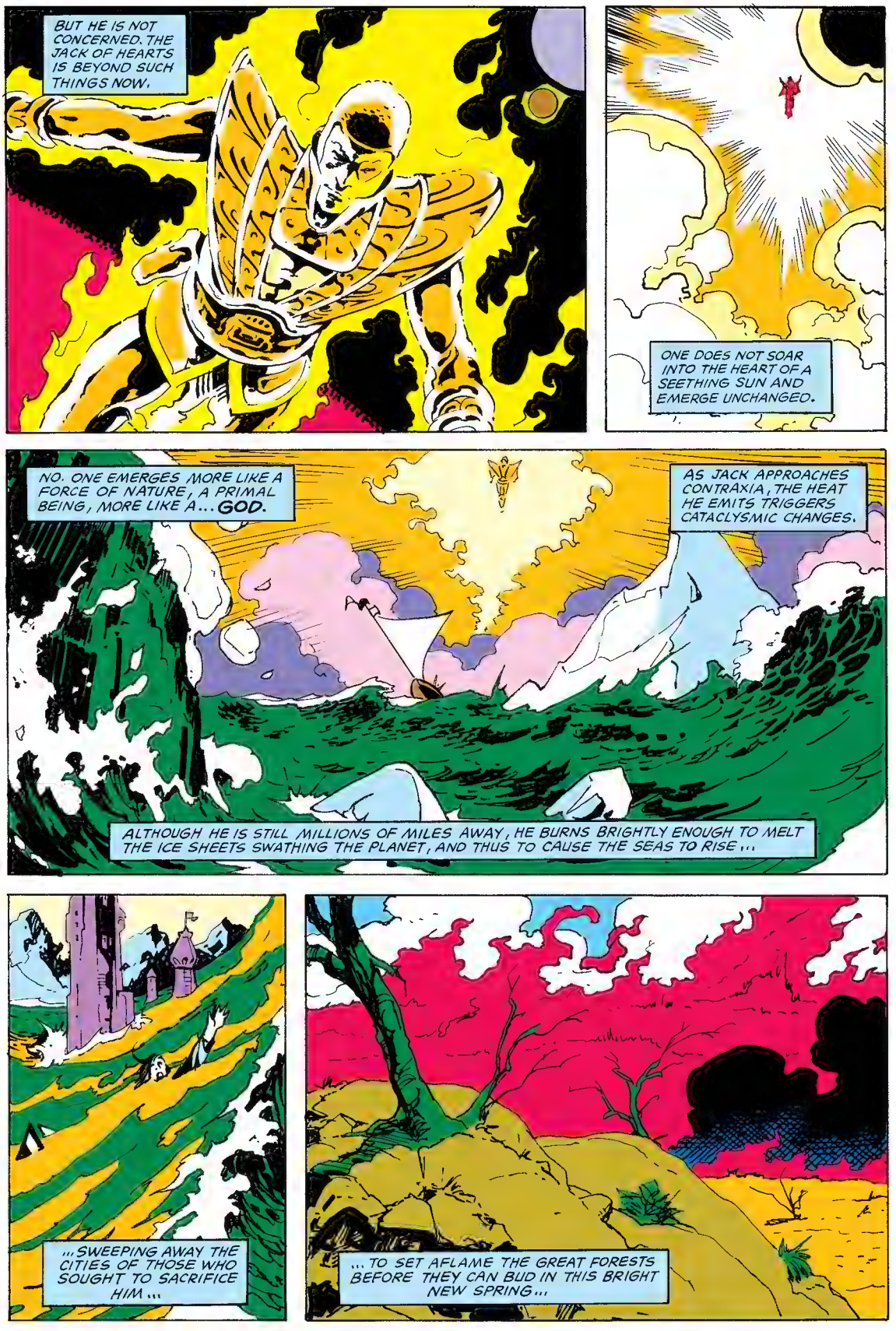

YOU DIED A HERO, VARGA...
...I CAN DO NO LESS!!
AND, OBSERVING FROM THE SURVIVALIST FLEET...
THE TIME OF REBIRTH IS ...NOW!
AARRRGGHH!!
THE JACK OF HEARTS IS A BEING PULSATING WITH POWER BEYOND HUMAN IMAGINING,
OF HIS OWN VOLITION, HE NOW PUMPS THAT POWER INTO CONTRAXIA'S SUN...
...SO THAT, TO THE PEOPLE OF HIS MOTHER'S PLANET, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH A NEW DAY HAS DAWNED!
BUT AMID THE REJOICING, THERE IS ONE WHO WONDERS: WILL THE PRICE OF SURVIVAL...
...BE THE LIFE OF A HERO?!!
AND, AS THE SUN-CRAFT VAPORIZES IN THE SCORCHING PLASMA THAT SURROUNDS IT, THE ANSWER SEEMS TO BE... YES!!

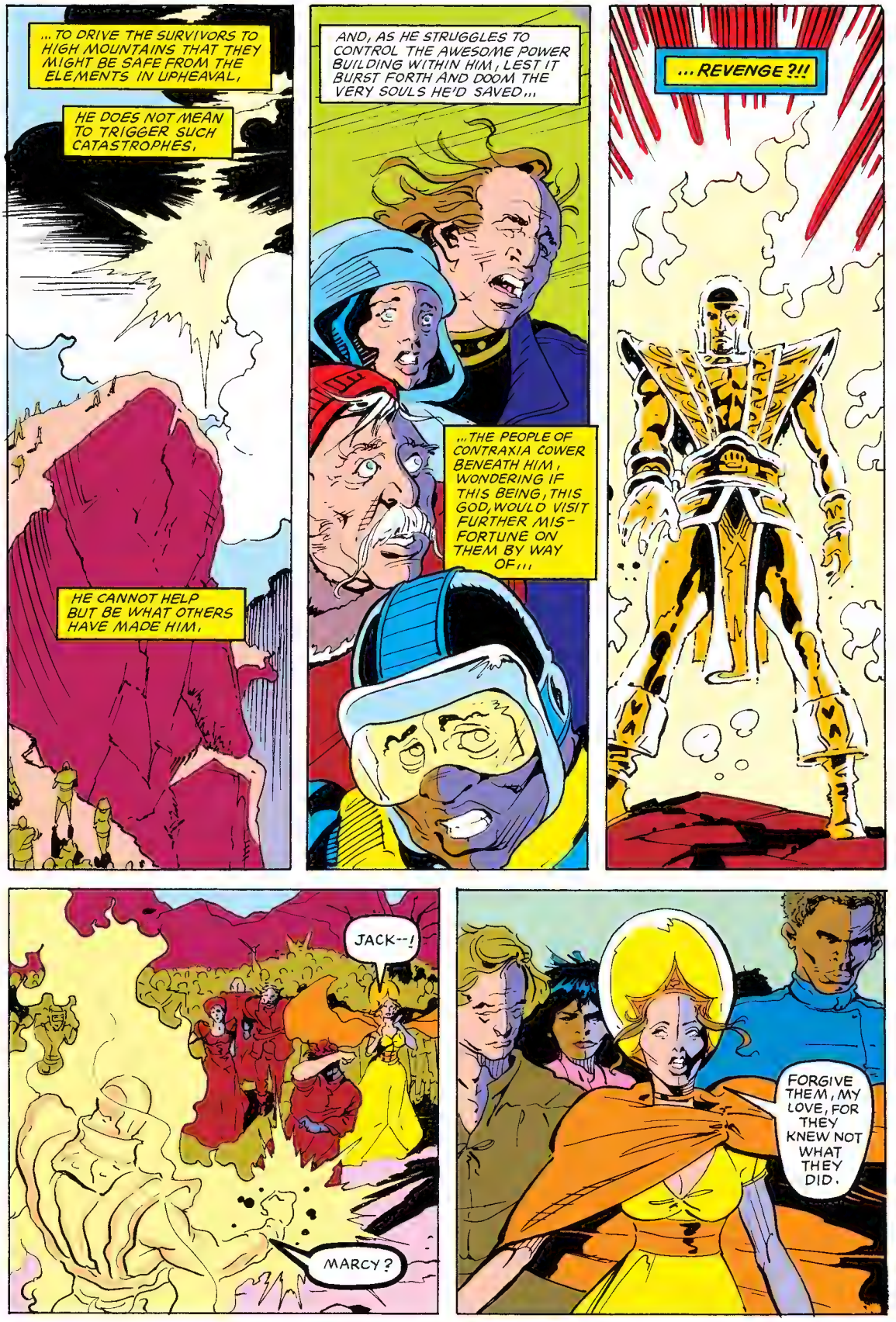

BUT...
ALL RIGHT, SUN, YA AIN'T KILLED ME YET, SO I'M COMIN' AT YA!!
I'M GONNA DO WHAT'S RIGHT!!
WHAT'S RIGHT FOR A WORLD, MARCY--IF NOT FOR OUR LOVE!
BUT I'VE MADE MY CHOICE!
LIFE'S HARD ON HEROES, HUH, MARCY?
AND WITH THAT THOUGHT IN MIND, JACK DIVES INTO THE SUN TO RELEASE ONE FINAL BURST, FULLY EXPECTING TO DIE IN THE ACT...

YET IN THE HEART OF THE INFERNO, THE JACK OF HEARTS LIVES!
HIS POWER PROTECTS HIM! HIS POWER DRIVES HIM ON!!
AND THEN, SUMMONING EVERY IOTA OF HIS INCREDIBLE, INCALCUABLE ENERGY...
...HE LETS THAT POWER POUR FORTH, PROMETHEUS REVERSED, BRINGING FIRE BACK TO A DYING SUN!!

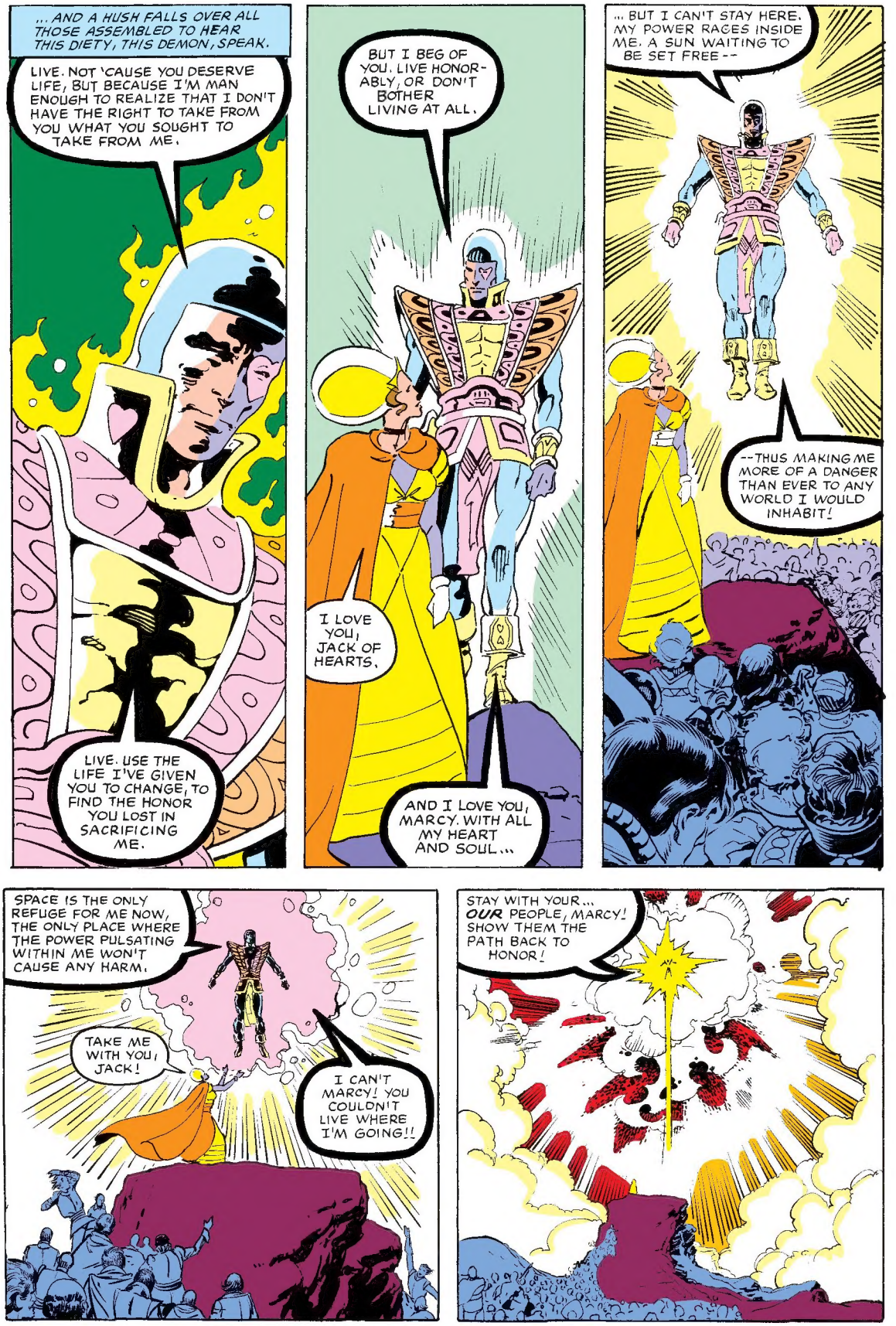
SOON, THE SNOW BEGINS TO MELT ON THE PLANET CALLED CONTRAXIA...
...AND THE LONG WINTER ENDS IN AN UNEXPECTED SOLSTICE, A REBIRTH OF THE SUMMER SUN,
AYE, GREET THE SUN, PRAISE ITS LIGHT, WELCOME ITS WARMTH...
...BUT NEVER FORGET HE WHO GAVE HIS LIFE THAT YOU MIGHT LIVE!
NEVER FORGET... THE JACK OF HEARTS!!
AND, AS THE SPY ASSUMES COMMAND OF THE SURVIVALIST FLEET...
IT IS DONE.
OUR WORLD LIVES, AND ONLY FOOLS WILL BEMOAN THAT THEIR LIVES WERE PURCHASED WITH A HALF-BREED'S BLOOD!
COMMANDER! ON THE VIEWSCREEN!
LOOK!!

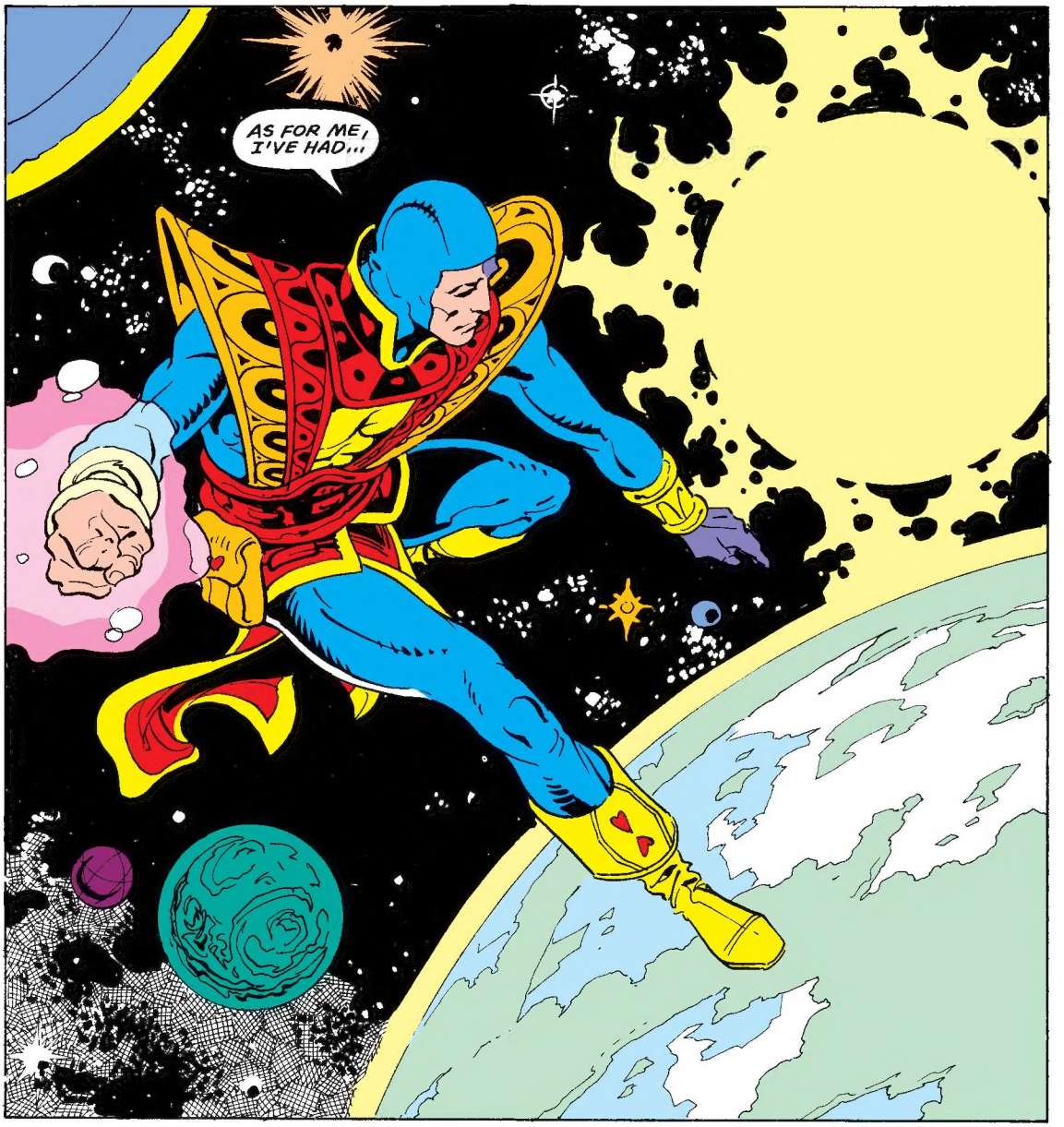

"THE JACK OF HEARTS--HE LIVES!!!"
YES, HE LIVES, AND FROM THE FIERY HEART OF A RE-VITALIZED SUN HE FLASHES, GLOWING LIKE A COMET!
M-MAN BATTLE-STATIONS!!
WHEN HE IS STILL FAR DISTANT, THE FLEET OPENS FIRE. MISSILES RAIN UPON HIM, ONLY TO MELT WITHOUT TOUCHING.
HE PAYS THE SURVIVALISTS NO HEED, FEELS NO ANGER TOWARD THEM, NO DESIRE FOR VENGEANCE...
... AND NO PITY WHEN THE INCREDIBLE HEAT HE GENERATES INCINERATES THEM OUT OF EXISTENCE IN THE DARK AND COLD VOID!
AIII, EEEEEEEE
IT WAS THEY WHO SENT HIM INTO THE HEART OF THEIR SUN. WERE HE CONCERNED OVER THEIR FATE AT ALL, IT WOULD ONLY BE TO THE EXTENT OF ACKNOWLEDGING, IRONICALLY, THAT THE SURVIVALISTS HAVE REAPED WHAT THEY HAVE SOWN!

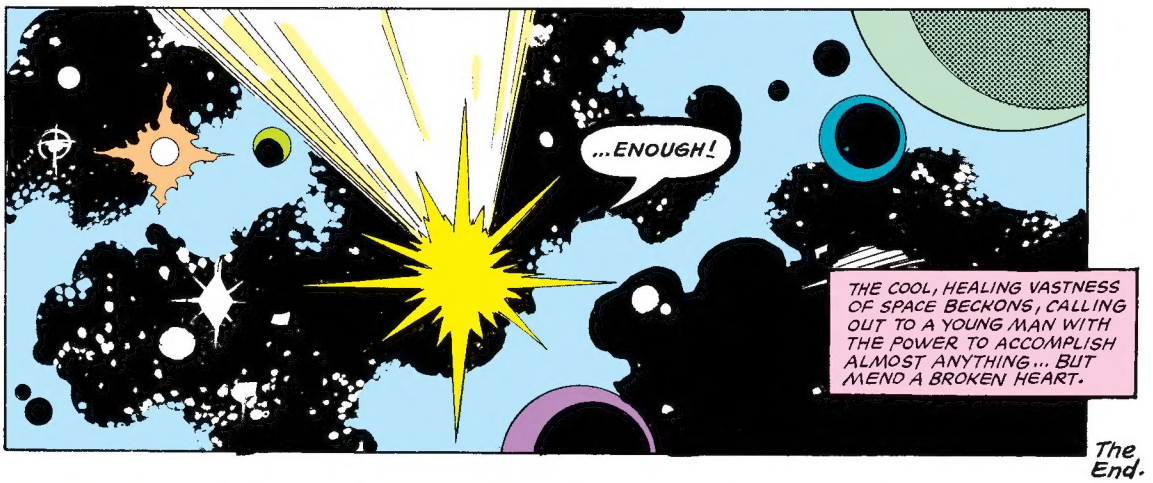

BUT HE IS NOT CONCERNED. THE JACK OF HEARTS IS BEYOND SUCH THINGS NOW.
ONE DOES NOT SOAR INTO THE HEART OF A SEETHING SUN AND EMERGE UNCHANGED.
NO. ONE EMERGES MORE LIKE A FORCE OF NATURE, A PRIMAL BEING, MORE LIKE A... GOD.
AS JACK APPROACHES CONTRAXIA, THE HEAT HE EMITS TRIGGERS CATACLYSMIC CHANGES.
ALTHOUGH HE IS STILL MILLIONS OF MILES AWAY, HE BURNS BRIGHTLY ENOUGH TO MELT THE ICE SHEETS SWATHING THE PLANET, AND THUS TO CAUSE THE SEAS TO RISE...
...SWEEPING AWAY THE CITIES OF THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO SACRIFICE HIM...
...TO SET AFLAME THE GREAT FORESTS BEFORE THEY CAN BUD IN THIS BRIGHT NEW SPRING...


...TO DRIVE THE SURVIVORS TO HIGH MOUNTAINS THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAFE FROM THE ELEMENTS IN UPHEAVAL,
HE DOES NOT MEAN TO TRIGGER SUCH CATASTROPHES,
HE CANNOT HELP BUT BE WHAT OTHERS HAVE MADE HIM.
AND, AS HE STRUGGLES TO CONTROL THE AWESOME POWER BUILDING WITHIN HIM, LEST IT BURST FORTH AND DOOM THE VERY SOULS HE'D SAVED...
...THE PEOPLE OF CONTRAXIA COWER BENEATH HIM, WONDERING IF THIS BEING, THIS GOD, WOULD VISIT FURTHER MISFORTUNE ON THEM BY WAY OF...
...REVENGE?!!
JACK--!
MARCY?
FORGIVE THEM, MY LOVE, FOR THEY KNEW NOT WHAT THEY DID.

SEEMS I'VE HEARD THAT BEFORE...
...BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY'VE DONE, YOU AND I CAN NEVER BE TOGETHER!
MY POWER HAS BECOME AN UNBRIDGE-ABLE GULF BETWEEN US!
BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO LIVE AT ANY PRICE--
--OUR LOVE MUST DIE!!
KAINA DARES NOT TOUCH HER BELOVED'S HAND, FOR IT BURNS AS BRIGHTLY AS THE SUN ITSELF...
...EVEN AS JACK SEEMS TO SEETHE WITH PRIMAL RAGE,
H-HE RAISES HIS HAND!
HE'LL DESTROY US ALL!
BUT THEN, THE JACK OF HEARTS LETS FALL HIS FIST...


... AND A HUSH FALLS OVER ALL THOSE ASSEMBLED TO HEAR THIS DIETY, THIS DEMON, SPEAK.
LIVE. NOT 'CAUSE YOU DESERVE LIFE, BUT BECAUSE I'M MAN ENOUGH TO REALIZE THAT I DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO TAKE FROM YOU WHAT YOU SOUGHT TO TAKE FROM ME.
LIVE. USE THE LIFE I'VE GIVEN YOU TO CHANGE, TO FIND THE HONOR YOU LOST IN SACRIFICING ME.
BUT I BEG OF YOU. LIVE HONORABLY, OR DON'T BOTHER LIVING AT ALL.
I LOVE YOU, JACK OF HEARTS.
AND I LOVE YOU, MARCY. WITH ALL MY HEART AND SOUL...
... BUT I CAN'T STAY HERE. MY POWER RAGES INSIDE ME. A SUN WAITING TO BE SET FREE--
--THUS MAKING ME MORE OF A DANGER THAN EVER TO ANY WORLD I WOULD INHABIT!
SPACE IS THE ONLY REFUGE FOR ME NOW, THE ONLY PLACE WHERE THE POWER PULSATING WITHIN ME WON'T CAUSE ANY HARM.
TAKE ME WITH YOU, JACK!
I CAN'T MARCY! YOU COULDN'T LIVE WHERE I'M GOING!!
STAY WITH YOUR... OUR PEOPLE, MARCY! SHOW THEM THE PATH BACK TO HONOR!


AS FOR ME, I'VE HAD...


...ENOUGH!
THE COOL, HEALING VASTNESS OF SPACE BECKONS, CALLING OUT TO A YOUNG MAN WITH THE POWER TO ACCOMPLISH ALMOST ANYTHING... BUT MEND A BROKEN HEART.

The End.

KAMIC RIDER
MARIKA